University of Alberta

PERSPECTIVES ON A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY CREATED THROUGH A UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP ON SMALL CLASS SIZE

by

Ann Back

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to obtain insight from teachers and administrators into how school administrators and a university partnership provided support in working towards successful implementation of a small class pilot project. Professional development activities and university-led reflective practice by Grade 1 teachers resulted in the development of a professional learning community. A qualitative approach to research was taken where teachers and principals were interviewed. Respondents were positive about the collaborative approach. Teachers felt that their success as a group was due to the support they were provided, the non-threatening environment to reflect on practice, and the presence of skilled facilitators. Teachers were unable to achieve success in other collaborative groups without these supportive conditions. It is recommended that the use of university partnerships be increased and that further research on the development of professional learning communities and their impact on teaching practices be conducted.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my husband, Jeff and my three sons, Ted, Joe, and David. Without their support and encouragement this degree would not have been completed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This research study concerns the activities of teachers, administrators, and university personnel involved in the Small Class Size Project and the Grade 1 cluster group in the City Centre Education Project. However, its focus is not on the impact of smaller classes or integrated schools, but on the opportunities these activities provided to the teachers to reflect on their practices and learn from each other in communities of inquiry.

In December 1999, Alberta Learning provided funding to the Edmonton Public School Board for a Small Class Size Project (SCSP) at the Grade 1 level. The purpose of the project was to identify the initial impact of small class size on Grade 1 students and to collect information on the teaching strategies that maximize the impact of small class size on Grade 1 students. The Board reduced the size of Grade 1 classrooms in the 10 highest-need schools in the district and principals in these schools immediately reorganized the Grade 1 classrooms in their schools and hired additional teachers for January 2000. In all, 17 small Grade 1 classes were formed (Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2003).

In January of 2000 the teachers in these schools also began a 6-month qualitative research study with the University of Alberta that focused on how the teachers had changed their teaching strategies as a result of having fewer students in their classrooms. Dr. Fern Snart led these sessions with the assistance of various graduate students, Dr. Margaret Haughey, and Dr. José da Costa (Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2003). Over the next 5 months the teachers met with university staff

five times to reflect on their teaching practices and how they had changed with the reduction of students in their classes. Many of the teachers in the project also wrote a report on one child who they felt had demonstrated the greatest amount of growth since this project started. Because this activity involved reflecting on and describing student growth, it provided additional focus for the group. From these meetings, a community of inquiry was formed (Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002).

Over the duration of the research project, the Edmonton Public School Board's inner city schools were also in the process of consolidating services. In June 2000 two schools were closed and seven inner city schools joined together to provide better programming for the students at the elementary and junior high level. The inner city schools that joined together were Norwood, John A. McDougall, Spruce Avenue, McCauley, Eastwood, Parkdale, and Delton. These schools became known as the City Centre Education Project (CCEP). Of these schools, five were also in the initial small class size project: Norwood, John A. McDougall, McCauley, Eastwood, and Parkdale.

In September 2000 two board initiatives were put into effect. The small Grade 1 class project, through Alberta Initiatives for School Improvement (AISI), was extended for 3 more years and the formation of the CCEP was firmed. With the formation of the CCEP, two new schools, Delton and Spruce Avenue, joined the five inner city schools that had been part of the small class size project.

There were four professional development activities that involved all of the CCEP Grade 1 teachers. Beginning in January 2000, all of the Grade 1 teachers in the Small Class Size Project and subsequently those in the CCEP were in-serviced in the use of the

Balanced Literacy Reading Program. They also received in-servicing on the use of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (Beaver, 2001) and they were to use it twice a year as an assessment tool, at the beginning of September and at the end of May. Just as the Small Class Size Project teachers had met together, the CCEP Grade 1 teachers met seven times a year for collaborative group meetings. These Grade 1 teachers and the teaching assistants in their classrooms formed the Grade 1 cluster group.

The fourth activity began in December 2000, when the Grade 1 cluster group teachers were informed by Sandra Woitas, the administrator for the CCEP, that they would continue to meet with the University of Alberta to reflect on their teaching practices. Due to changes in teaching staff and the addition of the two new schools, there were many new members to this community of inquiry.

The meetings with the University continued until June 2003. The Grade 1 CCEP teachers and teaching assistants continue to meet seven times a year.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to obtain insight from teachers and administrators into how school administrators and the university provided support and professional development to participating staff in working towards successful implementation of small class teaching strategies and the extent to which participation in this professional development led to the creation of other learning communities.

Research Questions

The following four questions provided a guideline in the development of interview questions and assisted in the analysis of the data:

- What strategies did the university and school leaders use in supporting the teachers in the Grade 1 cluster group?
- How did the university researchers assist members in the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group to form a professional learning community?
- How were new members of the group integrated into the university learning community?
- How have teachers transferred the strategies developed from this experience to other collaborative environments?

Significance of the Study

When the CCEP teachers took on the challenge of the small class size study, they soon learned that it was not just a matter of working with fewer students. They were expected to adapt their teaching to the new environment and demonstrate that smaller classes would provide a better education for their students. In order to succeed in this challenge, the teachers required further professional development and the support of their respective administrators. The study helped to identify strategies of support and professional development that were effective in bringing about the necessary changes in their teaching strategies and how they have transferred these strategies to other collaborative groups.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to Edmonton Public School teachers and administrators. The teachers interviewed were those involved in the Small Class Size Project and the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group. Administrators were also chosen based on their involvement in the Small Class Size Project and the City Centre Education Project.

Limitations

I have been involved in all aspects of the small class size project, the university partnership, and the Grade 1 cluster groups, and the CCEP professional development team, as a Grade 1 teacher.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 contains the context and the questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on professional learning communities and university partnerships. Chapter 3 outlines the interpretive inquiry methodology. In Chapter 4 the findings are provided under categories and themes while Chapter 5 discusses these in relationship the Literature Review and concludes with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

> The involvement of teachers in educational change is vital for its success, especially if the change is complex and affects many settings over periods of time. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 11)

The purpose of my study is to obtain insight into how district administrators and the University of Alberta provided support and professional development to participating staff, thus allowing for their successful involvement as well as the implementation of change in small class teaching strategies. The strategies were developed by teachers reflecting on their practices in a collaborative environment that could be called a professional learning community or a community of inquiry.

The professional learning community is a fairly recent concept within the context of professional development. The following literature review presents an overview of the theoretical work that addresses such communities and the role of leadership and university research partnerships in establishing them.

Approaches to a Definition

Professional development for a teacher comes in many forms and has been categorized by researchers depending on its purpose and effectiveness for changing strategies. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) developed three significantly different concepts of teacher learning that drive many of the most prominent and widespread

initiatives intended to promote teacher learning and professional development. These three derive from differing ideas about knowledge and professional practice and how these are related to one another in teachers' work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

The first approach, called knowledge-for-practice, is defined as formal knowledge and theory (assumed university-based) for teachers to use in order to improve practices. The second approach, knowledge-in-practice, sometimes called practical knowledge, is defined as some of the most essential knowledge for teaching or what very competent teachers know, because it is embedded in practice and in teachers' reflection on practice. The assumption with this approach is that teachers learn when they have the opportunity to probe the knowledge embedded in the work of expert teachers and/or to deepen their knowledge and expertise as makers of wise judgements and designers of rich learning interactions in the classroom (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

The third approach Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) define as knowledge-of-practice or inquiry as stance. This is what teachers learn when they work within the context of local inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) maintain that professional development cannot be understood in terms of a universe of knowledge that divides formal knowledge, on the one hand, from practical knowledge, on the other. From their perspective, knowledge is not bound by the instrumental imperative that it be used or applied to an immediate situation, but rather that it may also shape the conceptual and interpretive frameworks teachers develop to make judgments, theorize practice, and connect their efforts to larger

intellectual, social, and political issues, as well as work with other teachers, researchers, and communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Sergiovanni (1996) also divides teacher professional learning into three categories. His first is called teacher training. He defines teacher training as approaches to teacher development that resemble traditional in-service programs. They are best suited when a problem can be defined as teachers not knowing about something or needing to improve their skills in some area. Effective training programs provide opportunities for teachers to practice what they learn and then to receive coaching as they actually begin to use the new material in their classrooms (Sergiovanni).

Sergiovanni's (1996) second category of professional learning is called professional development. He defines the professional development approaches as providing teachers with rich environments filled with teaching materials, media, and devices. In professional development models teachers' capacities, needs, and interests are central. Teachers are actively involved in contributing data and information, solving problems, and analyzing. Both training and professional development approaches share the purpose of helping teachers to improve practices (Sergiovanni).

The third approach is called renewal. Sergiovanni (1996) defines renewal as doing over again, revising, making new, restoring, re-establishing, and evaluating, as teachers individually and collectively reflect on not only their practice but themselves and the practice of teaching that they share in the school (Sergiovanni).

Sergiovanni (1996) further defines these approaches by distinguishing between the three: In training, the emphasis is on building each individual's teaching skills by

planning and delivering instruction. In professional development, the emphasis is on building a professional community by helping teachers to become inquirers, problem solvers, and researchers of their own practices. In renewal, the emphasis is on building a caring community by encouraging teachers to reflect and to engage in conversations and discourse (Sergiovanni).

The third approach to professional learning is evident in the work of Lieberman (1996), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), and Hargreaves (1994) who have divided teacher development into two categories. The first they refer to as in-service training or staff development. They define this as the single-shot workshops or even week-long seminars that require teachers to comply with the knowledge, expertise, and prescriptions that are the property and prerogative of a small cadre of scientific experts (Hargreaves, 1994). The second category comes under different titles depending on the author, from teacher inquiry and a culture of support (Lieberman), and professional discourse communities (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), to collaborative cultures of positive risk and continuous improvement (Hargreaves). They all state that teachers need to collectively reflect on their practices and become leaders and learners in the context of the teaching practice rather than relying on *outside experts*.

Using Cochran-Smith and Lytle's categories, the professional learning community would be defined as knowledge-of-practice and knowledge-in-practice (Freedman, 2001). It would fall into Sergiovanni's categories of renewal and professional development. Referring to Lieberman (1996), McLaughlin (1994), and Hargreaves (1994), the professional learning community falls into their second categories—

communities of professional discourse, communities of cultural support, or communities of collaborative culture of positive risk and continuous improvement.

A working definition of a professional learning community, with associated characteristics, requires some elaboration. Lieberman and Miller (1999) and Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) have written about movement toward, and the need for, a collaborative and reflective environment in professional development.

> People learn by doing something and when they take the time to reflect on what they are learning they often become clearer on what they know, what they need to know, and what they believe. (Lieberman & Miller, 1999, p. 84)

> Professional development today also means providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practices and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597)

The professional learning community provides the opportunity for reflection and critique of practice combined with creation of new ideas.

A professional learning community or a community of inquiry is created when teachers work together to reflect intellectually on their practices (Blase & Blase, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Joyce, 2004; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996; Stokes, 2001). The focus of their reflection is on student learning. They analyze and critique their practices through working collaboratively and asking complex and provocative questions (Stokes). They connect their analysis of practice to the larger social, political, and cultural

issues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). They do this to not only enhance their knowledge of practice and to increase their understanding but to also bring about change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, 2004; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Nelson & Hammerman; Stokes).

Common Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

The concept of professional learning communities involves several common characteristics as outlined by various authors. Although their labels may differ, the characteristics have many common threads.

Developing Shared Values

One characteristic that is common in all of the literature on professional learning communities is the necessity of developing shared values, beliefs, and vision or mission (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Many of the researchers state that the shared values and vision of a professional learning community must have a focus on the student (DuFour, 2005; Hord, 2004; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Stokes, 2001). The teaching in the classroom is then done to ensure that all students are learning and engaged. This is a shift in professional development for change from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning (DuFour, 2005).

The benefits of having shared values and mission have been cited by various authors. Hargreaves (1994) stated that a sense of mission builds loyalty, commitment,

and confidence in the community. Many researchers state that the reflective process itself will assist the group members to clarify their values and beliefs through their writing and their discussions.

> Reflective dialogue in a professional learning community is marked by conversations that hold practice, pedagogy, and student learning under scrutiny. Talk is the bridge between educational values and improved practice in schools. Public conversations need to focus on four topics: academic content, the intelligent use of generic teaching strategies, the development of students, and the social conditions of schooling and issues of equality and justice. (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995, p. 30)

Reflective Dialogue

A second common characteristic found in the literature is the practice of engaging in reflective dialogue or inquiry. Researchers of professional learning communities have different titles for the reflective dialogue (Hord, 1997; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). Hord (2004) calls it collective learning and application. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1996) call it inquiry as stance and break it into four categories: time, text, talk, and task. DuFour and Eaker (1998) call it collective inquiry and further reference it with the work done by Ross, Smith, and Roberts (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998) who label it as the team learning wheel, a four-step process involving public reflection, shared meaning, joint planning, and coordinated actions.

Researchers agree that there are three components to the reflective dialogue. First is the way in which knowledge or text is constructed. Examples of text described in the literature are teaching strategies, curriculum, results, assessment practices, issues, problems, students, and common practices. Then the group needs to interpret, evaluate, critique, interrogate, elaborate, or challenge the text to bring about change or reform through joint-planning, action steps, initiatives, or awareness.

Common Purpose

The third characteristic, similar to that of shared values, is that a professional learning community needs to have a common purpose (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) or a shared practice (Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, 2004). The common purpose or practice will assist with structuring the dialogue, determining the text people share in the group, and the action they plan on implementing. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) note that the common purpose or goals must have flexibility. They must be able to change and evolve as necessary, rather than insist on permanent plans or promises (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Shared and Supportive Leadership

The fourth characteristic of the professional learning community is the need for shared and supportive leadership. This is a critical component that empowers the creation of a professional learning community or presents an obstacle in its absence.

For a professional learning community to be successful it must have supportive and shared leadership (Blase & Blase, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Fullan (2003b) and Sergiovanni (1996) discuss the leadership's role in a learning community as building the capacity of the staff. They define capacity building as enabling and empowering teachers by increasing their capacity to change and perform in new ways to get better results. This section begins with a description of the supportive conditions and actions that educational leaders create that assist with the development of a professional learning community. It concludes with the traditional relationships that create obstacles to shared leadership.

The leadership needs to encourage the teachers to reflect on their practices and to take action (Blase & Blase, 1998; Fullan, 2003b; Hord, 2004). They need to give high priority and support to conversations and dialogue among teachers. Redistribution of time and resources to ensure that teachers meet will demonstrate the high priority leadership has for the professional learning community (Blase & Blase; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1996).

Leaders should use the conversations and dialogue that teachers engage in when reflecting on their practices to determine and drive the staff development (Sergiovanni, 1996). Professional development should also be connected to the action plans that have been developed by the inquiry and guided by the shared vision (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Morrissey & Cowan, 2004).

In professional learning communities a culture of collaboration needs to be established where teachers, in self-managing teams, work to improve their own

instruction and embrace change to improve the learning in their classrooms (Blase & Blase, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1996; Schmoker, 2005). Teachers who work collaboratively, reflecting on their practices, will see creativity and effectiveness increase in their classrooms (Fleming, 2004).

Leaders need to view teachers as supervisors of the learning communities by sharing leadership.

> Administrators along with teachers must be learners: questioning, investing, and seeking solutions for school improvement and to increase student achievement. There is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else but rather the need for everyone to contribute. To foster shared leadership, the principal must encourage others to assume leadership roles and be able to recognize staff, parents, or others to be ready to take on leadership roles. (Hord, 2004, p. 8)

> Principals, superintendents, and other administrators must be willing to put aside the existing system of executive authority and to replace it with collegial authority—an authority embedded in shared commitments, shared ideas, and professional responsibilities. (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 153)

Principals in professional learning communities need to see themselves as leaders of leaders rather than leaders of followers, and broadening teacher leadership in their schools needs to become a priority (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). They need to develop the ability to share authority and to participate without dominating (Hord, 1997; Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Morrissey and Cowan (2004) and Fullan (2003b) believe that

structures and processes need to be developed for shared decision making. The shared decision making must be done on substantive issues; for example, budgets, student assessment, and student incentives. Fullan (2003a), as well as others, have written that they feel that all major issues need to be brought to the group before action is taken and that the common vision and goals will help lead them in their shared decision making.

The obstacle to developing shared leadership that has been cited in the literature is the perceived comfort in the traditional relationship between administrators and teachers. Some administrators are afraid that they would lose power and control when leadership is shared with the staff (Kruse & Louis, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996) and some teachers stated that they are unwilling to accept their share of the burden of leadership (Sergiovanni). They see it as taking even more of their time, which is at a premium, and they are more comfortable with teacher isolation. The notion of collegiality and shared leadership between teachers and principals causes uncertainty among some teachers because they think in terms of a hierarchy and they must let go of former habits such as criticizing the principal. They need to learn to discuss openly questions and concerns in the presence of the principal (Fleming, 2004).

An essential condition needed to invoke shared leadership is trust (Fleming & Thompson, 2004; Fullan, 2003b; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Sergiovanni; 1996; Sparks, 2005). This trust is for all of the members in the learning community. Fullan (2003b) defines this trust as relational trust. He states that it has four dimensions or criteria: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. Fullan (2003b) describes three categories of trust that were developed by Reina and Reina (1992): competence,

contractual, and communication. He further describes trust using these categories and giving them certain attributes. Competence trust includes respecting people's knowledge, skills, and abilities; respecting people's judgements; involving others and seeking their input; and helping people learn skills. Contractual trust includes managing expectations, establishing boundaries, delegating appropriately, encouraging mutually serving intentions, honouring agreements, and being consistent. Communication trust involves sharing information, telling the truth, admitting mistakes, giving and receiving constructive feedback, maintaining confidentiality, and speaking with good purpose (Fullan, 2003b). If there is a breakdown in trust, then the effectiveness of the professional learning community could be a concern.

Supportive Conditions

Professional learning communities have a number of supportive conditions (Hord, 1997; Louis & Kruse, 1995) that need to be in place for them to be successful. Authors writing about professional learning communities and collaboration also discuss potential obstacles that occur when supportive conditions are not present.

> Supportive conditions determine *when, where* and *how* the staff regularly come together as a unit to do the learning, decision making, problem solving, and creative work that characterize a professional learning community. (Hord, 2004, p. 10)

Supportive conditions (Boyd & Hord, 1994; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995) have been divided into two categories: physical and structural factors and human and social

capacities. Kruse, Louis, and Bryk's physical factors that contribute to supportive conditions include time to talk and meet, small size of the school and physical proximity of the staff to one another, teaching roles that are interdependent, communication structures, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment. Boyd (as cited in Hord, 2004, p. 10) also has a list of physical factors that he states are conducive for school change and improvement: the availability of resources; schedules and structures that reduce isolation; and policies that provide greater autonomy, foster collaboration, provide effective communication, and provide for staff development.

Kruse, Louis, and Bryk's (1995) second category, human and social resources, has a list of five conditions: openness to improve, trust and respect, socialization and the induction of new members, cognitive and skill base (access to expertise), and supportive leadership. Boyd and Hord (1994) call it "people capacity" (p. 4) and break it into four functions: reducing staff isolation, increasing staff capacity, providing a caring and productive environment, and improving the quality of the school's programs for students.

Potential Obstacles

A lack of these supporting conditions will create obstacles in the development of a professional learning community. In the literature, three obstacles are presented: time, teacher isolation, and occupational socialization.

Time is a very important dimension that is central to the work lives of the teacher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Fosnot, 1996; Freedman, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, 2004; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996). Lack of time available for

collaborative activities has been cited by many of the researchers as an obstacle to professional learning communities. Time obstacles are lack of time to meet, time to develop relationships and maintain them, time to gather samples, interview, document, and assess the materials that will be brought to the learning community for reflection.

Teacher isolation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; DuFour, 1999; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995) is a second obstacle to professional learning communities. Teachers have traditionally isolated themselves from other teachers. They have been a single adult, standing in front of a group of children, working in isolation. Any collaboration that has taken place is more on the working day-to-day life of school; rarely does it focus on teaching and learning (DuFour, 1999).

The isolation that teachers face also can be seen as protecting them from the scrutiny of others. Thus, even when they have the opportunity to engage in collaboration or to conduct teacher research, they are reluctant to do so because collaboration may come at the price of exposure and the loss of autonomy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996).

The third obstacle to professional learning communities has been categorized by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1996) as occupational socialization:

> Asking questions and being uncertain are inappropriate behaviors for all but the most inexperienced teachers, and even they have only brief periods of grace during which they may ask limited numbers of questions. The occupational culture perpetuates the myth that good teachers rarely have questions they cannot answer about their own practices or about larger schools and schooling issues. (p. 96)

Sarah Freedman (2001), in her study, also found that experienced teachers found it difficult to discuss and write about problems that were occurring in their classrooms.

Professional learning communities are found in a variety of locations or forms. The most common form or location of a professional learning community is the school-wide professional learning community (Hord, 2004; Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995; Little, 2001; Roberts & Pruitt; 2003; Senge, 2000; Stokes, 2001). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and Stokes discuss other locations and opportunities where professional learning communities are found. Communities may be organized across subject-matter, university/school collaborations, school to school, teacher to teacher, or teachers involved in district regional or national initiatives. A teacher therefore, has the potential to be involved in more than one professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996).

Because this study is focused on a university research partnership a review of the literature on such partnerships (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Freedman, 2001; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002; Miller, 2001; Miller & O'Shea, 1996) and subject-specific professional learning groups (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) was completed.

University Research Partnerships

Individual reflection with small group support fostered reflective experimentation with new behaviors and ideas in a setting that valued individuality and

multiplicity of perspective, and that also granted teachers an individual pace of learning and change. (Stokes, 2001, p. 148)

Historically, university research was seen by teachers as being far removed from the reality of the classroom and school practices (Miller & O'Shea, 1996). Too many teachers viewed research (more or less by definition) as distant, uninteresting, and impenetrable (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996). University research partnerships, where a community of inquiry has been formed, can change teachers' views of university research.

Teacher research, where teachers are working with members of the university, inquiring and reflecting on their practices in the classroom and the school, makes accessible the expertise of teachers and provides both the university and the teachers with a unique perspective on teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Freedman, 2001; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002). The teachers, through reflecting on their practices and then having the opportunity to share and discuss classroom events with other people—researchers, teacher educators, and other teachers—begin to reinvent their own practices and consider alternatives (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Freedman; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996).

As with professional learning communities, certain supportive conditions need to occur. Many of the supportive conditions discussed in the literature on university research partnerships are the same as those discussed in the literature on professional learning communities; however, due to the traditional hierarchical relationships that have existed between universities and teachers and schools, the following different supportive

conditions need to be in place to give the research credibility and allow the teachers to trust that the information they share will be valued (Miller & O'Shea, 1996).

The first supportive condition that is different is determining a place to meet that is comfortable for all members of the group and ensures that the relationship is equal (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002; Miller & O'Shea, 1996). Second, a method needs to be in place to ensure that all members equally contribute to the discussions (Miller & O'Shea). Experienced teachers and new teachers must be valued and given an equal voice and feel safe to say things they would not say in another setting (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Stokes, 2001). The meetings must give teachers a safe and non-judgmental forum for discussing practices (Freedman, 2001; Miller & O'Shea).

> Over time, communities that support teacher research, develop their own histories and in a certain sense, their own culture—a common discourse, shared experiences that function as touchstones and a set of procedures that provide structure and form for continued experience. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996, p. 100)

A third supportive condition that was discussed in the literature on university research partnerships was the introduction of new members to the group, when the group had already been formed. Miller and O'Shea (1996) stressed the need for a process for introducing new members to the group so that they do not feel they are entering a closed conversation and that they are not welcomed to the group due to the history of the relationship.

The last supportive condition that was different in university partnerships was the need to accommodate a wide range of texts. These texts are those that are essential to the teachers' individual and collective gathering, recording, and analyzing of data (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996). Teachers in the group will not always choose to reflect on the same *text*. They are coming from a variety of classrooms and schools with different focuses; therefore, what they see as important will not always be the same.

University research partnerships, when they are successful, are usually empowering for all of the members involved. They give the university information that assists them in understanding the daily life of the teacher and the school. They allow researchers to write on issues that are relevant and important to practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996). Teachers who engage in self-directed inquiry about their own work find the process intellectually satisfying (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Freedman, 2001; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2002). They see themselves as the researcher rather than the researched. This opportunity brings value to what they do every day and they see themselves as generating knowledge-of-practice and knowledge-in-practice (Freedman) that will assist them with school reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Summary

The idea of a professional learning community is a fairly recent concept that holds significant promise in teacher professional development. The literature reviewed has demonstrated that professional learning communities transform professional development from a passive learning of other "expert" strategies to an active, democratic, and

empowering learning that makes professional demands of teachers and educational leaders. Such communities demand shared values and common purposes as well as a change in focus from teacher to learner. Such communities also demand that educational leaders provide physical and intellectual support and that they be willing to share power to achieve positive outcomes. The reflection and dialogue required on the part of teachers in such communities provides opportunities to adopt new strategies and to re-shape them as conditions change.

Where university partnerships are included in such communities, the potential exists for teachers to see themselves as researchers rather than passive objects of study. This may further empower them and enable them to make the successful and ongoing changes that Hargreaves (1994) refers to in the opening selection of this section.

The literature reviewed has provided a framework with which to study the professional development that takes place within a professional learning community. For this particular project, the reflections and reactions of teachers and administrators may provide insights into strategies of support and the perceived success or failure of the professional development provided to the Grade 1 teachers in the small class size project.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study was based on the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hatch, 2002), where the researcher and the participant co-construct understandings using naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln, 2001). I utilized a qualitative approach in an attempt to understand the opinions, attitudes, and practices of the study participants with regard to the small class size project, and the attendant professional development and support they received from the school administration when they participated in the project. The approach also involved administrators who were active in the program in order to understand how they perceived the project and their role in providing support to the participants.

Participants

In all, six teachers and four administrators agreed to be interviewed. These individual sessions lasted from 35 to 90 minutes. In general, teacher interviews were longer than those of the administrators. Teachers were selected from those who were involved in the small class size project and the Grade 1 cluster group in the CCEP. They were chosen from three groups: those who were involved in the two projects identified above, those who joined for the continuing study as part of the CCEP, and those whose assignments changed and who were no longer group members. Administrators were

chosen based on their involvement in the small class size project and their involvement in the CCEP.

Since the two projects involved 11 teachers and 7 administrators, it was necessary to select potential interviewees. The participants were chosen to include a range of opinions and experiences. The principals came from four different schools and had entered both projects at different stages. The teachers chosen came from four different schools as well, however they were not always from the same schools as the principals. The teachers were chosen to include both experienced and those that were new to teaching. They were also chosen to include teachers who were in the CCEP and in the grade one cluster group, those who had remained in the CCEP but had changed their cluster group, and those who had moved out of the CCEP to different schools in Edmonton Public. The teachers and principals were approached personally and invited to participate. Where a person did not agree to participate, another was chosen to ensure the same range of experiences.

Data Collection

A semi-standardized (Berg, 1995) or a semi-structured (Hatch, 2002) interview format was used. The semi-structured interview is defined as one where the researcher comes to the interview with a set of guiding questions but is open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during the interview interaction (Hatch). This format was used to allow the participants to reflect on their involvement and

experiences in the small class size project and in the CCEP cluster group before meeting. Some of the participants had not been involved in these two projects for 3 years.

The predetermined questions that were asked of each interviewee were formed based on the linear frame that emerged through the two projects and the literature review. The questions that were asked of the teachers were different from those asked of the administrators because of their different perspectives and their different involvement in the projects (see Appendix A).

There was one formal interview per participant and the length of the interview varied based on the participant's perspective and willingness to reflect and digress from the questions. The interviews were scheduled in coordination with the interviewee so that they did not interfere with class time or class preparation.

The interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy and then transcribed into text by myself and a professional transcriber.

The first interview was an exception. The teacher was retiring and moving from the area and needed to be interviewed earlier than proper preparation allowed. Our conversation, therefore, was a free flow dialogue about the entire experience in which we had both participated. The session was tape recorded and I made journalistic notes on the encounter. My questions were not formulated until after the interview. Later, I found that the flow of the conversation closely paralleled the themes explored by other participants.

After my second interview, I realized that the interviewee was answering the guiding questions but was not expanding on her answers. I reviewed my questions and rewrote them so that they would encourage conversation.

In another interview, the tape recorder was not functioning and I kept handwritten notes that reflected the questions and answers as accurately as possible.

The conventional interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. As these have been kept on file, and been sent to the respondents for verification, no extensive journaling took place.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between descriptive and interpretation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Data analysis was done through transcribing the interviews and closely listening to the tapes repeatedly. During data collection I decided to transcribe an interview. I found that by doing the transcribing myself, I was forced to listen closely during their responses. I then decided to transcribe the remainder of the interviews myself.

"Devising categories and themes is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The findings were first categorized based on the principal's and teacher's responses and the four research questions. Later the findings were organized into categories and themes. The categories were developed using a chronological order that sequenced the events as they occurred. Categories will be presented from the principals', followed by the teachers' perspectives of and reactions to these events, as their

involvement in each was different. Following this, the themes emerged from an inductive analysis of the interviews and reactions of the principals and teachers.

Trustworthiness

The methodologies employed in this study conformed to the four criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed to build trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry.

Credibility

"Credibility relates to the degree of confidence in the 'truth' that the findings of a particular inquiry has for the subjects with which-and the context within-which the inquiry was carried out" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Credibility was enhanced by three methods in this study: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checks.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

I had a shared relationship with all the teachers being interviewed since I participated in the small class size project and continue to be a member of the Grade 1 collaborative group in the CCEP. As such, I have observed all aspects of the small class size project and the formation of the professional learning community developed through this project.

I have worked with all of the principals interviewed through the CCEP.

This study was supported by prolonged engagement and persistent observation. I had been engaged in and observed all aspects of the small class size project and the formation of the professional learning community that developed from it. I have participated in and observed the professional development offered, the leadership and support provided by the administration, the teaching strategies that came out of the professional development sessions, and the reactions of participants to the program both formally and (to some extent) informally or privately.

Member Checks

Interview sessions were recorded, transcribed into text, analyzed, and summarized as categories and themes (Chapter 4). This chapter was returned to the participants for assessment and they were asked to:

1. Confirm that the chapter accurately reflected their understandings and perceptions as they intended to report them,
2. Identify if they felt important issues were not included in the interview,
3. Identify if I had erred in interpreting the data.

Transferability

"An inquiry is judged in terms of the extent to which its findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 280). Two methods of insuring transferability are thick description and purposive sampling.

In Chapter 2, the Review of the Literature, numerous theoretical works and resources were accessed and reviewed in order to provide as complete a description of professional learning communities as possible.

Purposive sampling was achieved through selection of potential participants who were from a variety of schools and who were involved in different stages of the overall project as described in the Participants section. "This purposive sampling in contrast to random sampling presents focus on the specific information that is relative to this particular study" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 33).

Dependability

"Dependability is defined as, providing its audience with evidence that, if it were replicated with the same or similar respondents (subjects) in the same (or a similar) context, its findings would be repeated" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Records of this study were kept to facilitate any challenges to the data by any future dependability audit.

1. Records were kept of any meetings and correspondence between the researcher and her advisor to document major decisions made concerning data collection and analysis methodologies,
2. A research journal in which decisions were made about the data was maintained,

3. Transcripts of interviews will be backed up and stored in hard copy as well as electronically in a secure location. They are available to future researchers interested in auditing the study.

Confirmability

For this study confirmability of the findings was judged in terms of the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Confirmability, like dependability, was communicated by an audit (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Interviewees were sent Chapter 4, Findings and Categories, for review. This audit resulted in two respondents clarifying and augmenting their responses.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Faculty of Education and the Edmonton Public School Board. Both projects are very well known. The number of schools involved is limited and the participants know each other. To insure for the participants anonymity and confidentiality, I decided not to provide pseudonyms and provided very limited background information. Copies of transcripts and data, and Chapter 4 were returned for verification.

CHAPTER 4

CATEGORIES AND THEMES

The purpose of this chapter is to present the principals' and teachers' perspectives and reactions to three events that affected Grade 1 teachers in the inner city. These events have a chronological order but they are not mutually exclusive since they combined to create an ongoing collaborative group. Categories will be presented from the principals', followed by the teachers' perspectives of, and reactions to these events, as their involvement in each was different. Following this, the themes that arose from an inductive analysis of the interviews and reactions of the principals and teachers will be discussed.

The voices of the principals and teachers are presented using paraphrasing and supported with direct quotes. Their understandings are grouped under three categories. The first category is the introduction of the small class size project. This is followed by descriptions and understandings of the university partnership that developed through the research and that later accompanied the small class size project. The creation of the CCEP and the formation of the Grade 1 cluster group comprise the third category.

Categories

Category 1: Small Class Size Project

The funding of the small class size project initiated the hiring of new teachers, the movement of students to different classes, the buying of instructional materials, and the teachers' professional development in Balanced Literacy and the Diagnostic Reading

Assessment. Of the people interviewed, three principals and four teachers were involved in the initial small class size project. One of the teachers interviewed was hired later in the school year (January) because of the project.

Principals' Perspectives

The principals interviewed all had different understandings of how the small class size project for Grade 1 students in high needs schools would be beneficial in their particular schools. One principal felt that the additional space was important to allow students to move around the class and have easier access to materials and to teacher time.

> I was in favour across the board about smaller class sizes in the city core and there was very good reasons for it and I just said that if kids come from very confined living spaces where there is not enough stuff to share and not enough space that if you put them in really tightly packed classrooms that same kind of feeling is there. They can't turn around without knocking over somebody's books and that is seen as negative behaviour and not a thing of space. If they are not getting enough parent time and if you put them in a confined space then they are not getting enough teacher time as well. (Personal communication, 2006)

A principal who was developing a culture of shared leadership in her school through many initiatives saw this project as honouring the teacher's voice.

> So when the small class size study started at our school that just complemented the work that I believe we were already doing. It complemented very much the

> work we were really trying to put forward in the inner city. I call it valuing the teacher's voice. (Personal communication, 2005)

One principal, who was new to his school, saw this project as an opportunity to begin to change the school from a top-down to a grassroots model of leadership as well as a motivating force toward change in the school. He used the project as a method for getting a teacher to change her practices through conversations with him that would require her to reflect on her practices as well as adopt a leadership role.

> The school I was working in was in a pretty much a top down mode so I was relatively new there and that really was one of my goals there was to change that mode and create more ownership. So along came this project in a top down way, really we hadn't developed the idea. That part of the work came from a top down way so the way it came about didn't necessarily continue the facilitation of that but it did provide us with opportunities to say to people, "Okay, now we have to create this. Here's the idea, we have to create this" and that's always a delicate walk just like the language issue. How you engage people especially with the small class suddenly you find yourself with fewer kids and the luxury of breathing. Do you keep practicing the same way you were and breathe easier or do you really engage in changing how you work and that became the delicate conversation of how much you can allow people to do their own facilitation and how much they need gentle pushing. And that's how that conversation went at my school. You have ownership to take the lead in shaping what this looks like but

> we really do have to change what we are doing . . . which is an interesting and challenging mix of things. (Personal communication, 2006)

Two principals viewed the Grade 1 teachers as the educational leaders and the source of expertise in this project so that they must have a voice. As one stated:

> I really supported that whole notion that the teachers be involved directly in the conversations related to what difference it would make. What difference it would make to their teaching, to the kids learning, and that they had to be part of that discussion. (Personal communication, 2006)

The other principal took it a step further:

> The teachers knew Grade 1 a lot better than I knew, than I'll ever know Grade 1—and let's honour that. That's how you build stronger professionals. It's not by doubting their work. You honour those people who are working with those kids and the teachers were very much a piece of that action. (Personal communication, 2005)

In addition to support for teachers involved in the project, the principals appreciated the recognition and support that the project received from the superintendent. According to them, he demonstrated support for them in three ways: by providing financial support, by influencing policy, and by taking risk.

One stated that the superintendent wanted to influence policy:

> You've got to think of it this way. Small class size started with the superintendent, with him thinking, let's pick the high needs schools, let's throw some money at it,

> and because we had good data it began to influence policy. Look at small class size today. (Personal communication, 2005)

> Another principal saw that the superintendent financially supported the project: The superintendent was very much in favour of it, he wanted it. He didn't worry so much about whether or not the money was there. He knew the money would come and let us go ahead with it before we actually had the financial support for it. (Personal communication, 2006)

> Another saw him as supporting them as the leaders of both projects that had risks: I just found him willing to take the risk with us if he felt that we were really committed to that whole thing and I think it filtered through City Centre Education Project as well, that he was willing to take the risk with us spearheading that project. (Personal communication, 2006)

The principals interviewed, then, saw their role as supporting and facilitating the project, thus fulfilling their obligation to the superintendent, while giving the teachers a leadership role in deciding how to change practice to make the project a success.

Teachers' Perspectives

The initial reaction of the Grade 1 teachers when the small class size project was announced was one of shock, excitement, and sadness. Very few initiatives of this kind are announced in December as most are introduced during the spring or summer thereby

allowing administrators and teachers to plan before the students come to school in the fall. The very first reaction then was one of shock. This teacher discussed how the news was broken to her and her reaction.

> Originally I was called in. We had a staff meeting early one morning and this was the day the announcement was being made, here at our school, in my classroom, but I didn't know what was going on and was informed that they were hiring a new Grade 1 teacher at the staff meeting and I am sitting there going what? Did I just lose my job? This was in front of the whole staff. Then it was explained to me that we would be hiring a new teacher for the project. (Personal communication, 2005)

The shock continued as the media became involved in the project immediately, and teachers did not have all the information. One teacher described it as:

> The next day of course we had the news conference kicking it off in my classroom. It was done the morning after our Christmas concert. So the room, I came real early in the morning to clean up the classroom because you know what it looks like after the Christmas concert. It is a pig-sty. It was all here and I had to talk and I didn't have a clue what was happening. (Personal communication, 2005)

Then came excitement because the teachers realized that they were going to be able to relax a little on their classroom management with fewer students and that their classrooms would be very different. Finally, a little sadness came into the equation

because teachers would be losing half of the students in the classroom that they had been working with and seen growth in. One teacher said,

> I was called in to make a decision about whether or not I wanted to take the Grade 1 class or the Grade 2 class and I was given 24 hours to make the decision. I agonized and agonized over my decision. (Personal communication, 2005)

As the work of the project began, the teachers' degree of involvement in decision making varied depending on the styles of leadership found in their school. In one of the schools, a teacher was responsible for most of the decisions. She was responsible for purchasing materials, splitting the classrooms, and mentoring the newly hired Grade 1 teacher. Her administrator had other things he was focusing his attention on. She said:

> I had to split the classes and I had to do all of the ordering of the supplies for the new teacher that was hired. I really had to mentor the new teacher. She was in my class every day and every night asking for things and asking questions. I got her units and packages for students together. I had to take over everything to do with the project and I got no recognition. I did everything. Professionally I enjoyed being part of the project but I was exhausted. He did really nothing. He was not interested. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another assisted with the hiring of a new teacher for the project and discussed how she and her new partner then went on to team teach together and form a personal as well as professional bond:

> I did get to help hire the person that came in and I was in on all of the interviews. It was nice because my principal did expect us to work as a team and it ended up

> that we are very dear friends and we worked totally as a team. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another teacher, who was not as involved in the initial planning and preparation work, still felt that she was supported by her administrators. She said, "My principal and my assistant principal were terrific. They immediately hired a new teacher, divided up my class, and ordered new levelled books."

A new teacher hired for the project felt a very different level of support from the principal and the Grade 1 teacher in her school. She was allowed to have time to get to know the students and the style of teaching and management they were accustomed to before she had her own class.

> I became a part of the small class size project because I was hired as one of the teachers to take over some of the kids because the Grade 1 teacher's class was split in half. So, initially the principal just had me watch and observe what the other teacher was doing so it was great because I hadn't been in a classroom for a long time and she just told me to relax, sit back, and observe for a good week. So that was great. (Personal communication, 2005)

Other teachers in the schools also supported the project. They recognized that having smaller classes in Grade 1 would give the students skills that would assist them as they moved up the grades. One teacher said it very simply when she said, "In my own school they were supportive. They knew in the long run it was good for them when they got the students."

A key component of the small class size project was the professional development that was provided for participating teachers. They were required to attend workshops on Balanced Literacy and the Developmental Reading Assessment. Balanced Literacy allowed the teachers to have a common program and a common language when discussing students. One teacher discussed this common language as being beneficial when a student transfers from one school to another as they have continuity of programming:

> [Balanced Literacy and the DRA] gave me guidelines and I could tell others because we had a common vocabulary and we were doing the same things. It strengthened the language arts program. Our report cards had common comments. When I got a new student from CCEP or a Balanced Literacy school I knew where that student was at . . . when students transfer from their school they do not lose much time. [I] know which reading group the student should be placed in, then, if they do not fit in I move them, but I do not have to wait to assess. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another teacher thought that being trained in Balanced Literacy was good for her students because their lives were unstructured and she was also concerned with them moving from school to school, but she saw it as the need for structure. She said,

> Our students live very unstructured lives and I think that's where something like Balanced Literacy really helped because it is structure. They know we're doing Making Words and all of the different language arts activities every day and when

> they go to another school they're going to do the same. (Personal communication, 2005)

The DRA (Beaver, 2001) was a program that all the teachers in the initial small class size project were trained in because it was the assessment tool that the district was using to determine the Grade 1 students' growth in reading. Students individually read to the teacher who kept a running record. After reading the passage, the student was asked a series of comprehension questions. This was very different from the usual measure which was a levelled reading book with multiple choice questions that is administered to the whole group. The teachers' response to using the DRA (Beaver) varied in how beneficial they felt it was. One teacher saw it as beneficial for assessing Grade 1 students because it supported Balanced Literacy and was a good assessment tool for new students. It evaluated reading comprehension very well, but it was time consuming.

> I loved it for Grade 1. It supported Balanced Literacy. It is very hard to administer because it is one-on-one and during class time but it gives excellent information. If I had been given supply time it would have been easier. New students who came in I would test when I was in the small class. It also gave us a good basis for determining comprehension not just reading rate. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another teacher thought it was a great initial assessment tool to determine where students were reading at the beginning of the year and to assess growth by administering at the end of the year; however, she too saw it as very time consuming.

> And at the beginning of the year I didn't know the students anyways so it was one tool to kind of tell you where they were at but there are so many other things that

> play into where you think they're at. So initially it was good and at the end of the year to see the growth but to tell you the truth it wasn't . . . it was good to be able to do it and to have the time to do it. (Personal communication, 2005)

Teachers' reactions and perceptions of the small class size project focused on personal reactions to their role in the project, the concept of support received from the administration and colleagues, and finally on the professional development that was provided for them. Their interviews revealed a concern for student achievement, administrative ease and efficiency in dealing with new or transferring students, and time management issues. Changes they made to their classroom practices were not revealed in these perceptions.

Category 2: University Partnership

As stated previously, a research component that accompanied the small class size project was a partnership with the University of Alberta Faculty of Education. This research component provided a forum for teachers to meet and reflect on their practices. Despite being in the small class size project, many of the teachers interviewed had never worked together until they met through this university partnership.

All of the teachers and principals interviewed were involved to some degree in the university partnership. They were involved through the initial small class size project or through the continued partnership with the university that was created through the City Centre Education Project. The principals' and teachers' perspectives and reactions have been separated because their level of involvement was different.

Principals' Perspectives

The principals were not involved directly in this group but they supported the teachers participating in the university partnership. Three of the principals interviewed supported the partnership because they trusted the process.

One principal was impressed with how the researchers got the teachers to examine their practices with class size reduced:

> The fact that it got people to examine how you organize a group of 25 and you would organize differently for a group of 15 and how you can employ different methods and different strategies and do different things. (Personal communication, 2006)

Another discussed the ability of the facilitators to ask questions because of their experiences with doing research. She also felt that they had experience with graduate students that would assist them in working with the teachers.

> They knew how to ask those questions. They knew how to ask those questions because their jobs as researchers and plus they supervise a billion graduate students, they know how to bring out that. I think without that, I think good work would have still happened, I don't think such exceptional work would have happened. I think the university was important to us bringing it to a different level, to a more intellectual level, and a more reflective level. (Personal communication, 2005)

One of the principals interviewed, because of past experience, had doubts about university involvement. He was concerned about the relationship the facilitators would have with the group. He was worried about trust since university personnel were observers rather than participants.

> I think the groups that are the most successful were probably more successful without the university facilitator because I think that, and I could be wrong, because I never was part of that group. But I think when you have somebody (university personnel) who is not really part of the group it changes the dynamic and that was kind of the role that they were there, they were kind of observers. (Personal communication, 2006)

After later discussion, he changed his opinion because he trusted the facilitator who was involved in the study and therefore he trusted the process.

> A skilled facilitator can be very good but it takes a skilled facilitator to not interfere with the process. He is extremely skilled and he uses the right language like you were saying. He uses both verbal and nonverbal language to allow people to feel what they are saying is valued. (Personal communication, 2006)

Trust of the facilitators at the university came up in all of the interviews with the principals. All of the principals knew at least one of the facilitators and they trusted them.

> And how better to have . . . who better to as an advocate at that level. He really understood us and our work. We didn't have to translate it for him, he knew it. (Personal communication, 2006)

> I think the political climate was right for us, and the university was integral to us because I do not think and not saying that the skills that teachers around that table weren't good, I don't think they had the same way especially one facilitator. She could get stuff out of you. She can pull stuff and she will look at, she's got that way about her. (Personal communication, 2005)

There was the general feeling here that the university partnership helped to provide focus to move the project ahead and that the facilitators were effective because they were experienced, non threatening, and could be trusted.

Teachers' Perspectives

The teachers were more directly involved in the university partnership and all six of the teachers interviewed enjoyed the experience. They shared their thoughts on the physical setting and the themes that were used to welcome the teachers and engage them in reflecting on their practices. One teacher appreciated the thought and effort that went into creating a pleasant atmosphere:

> Well I can remember the room being decorated. I think it was the grad student that had a bit of a creative flair and she'd have them use a music theme or a spring theme and she'd have all kinds of stuff all over the place to really make you, to make it feel like a community and that it was something special. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another felt that the university setting and experience encouraged her to go to another level of thinking that would not occur in another (school-based) setting. She stated:

> Going to the university I felt was a learning experience. They respected us. I worked on that paper all summer. I sent my daughter away so that I could. Thinking, focusing, and reflecting stimulated me in intellectual pursuits. (Personal communication, 2005)

All of the teachers discussed the importance of methods used to get them reflecting on their practices. They discussed the questions that were asked prior to the group sessions and the flexible agenda. They also discussed how they felt that they were the experts and that the university did not have all the answers. Three teachers said:

> Drawing our classrooms and justifying why we had changed them to look that way was the beginning. They listened to us and I think they probably changed their agenda based on what we said. We were experts. I felt I had a voice for all Grade 1 teachers because it was a pilot project and it was important. I know that is what is best for kids. (Personal communication, 2005)

> The questions they sent us helped for us to reflect on our classrooms and students. They were really interested and that was reflected in the sessions. They trusted us with the information and I was able to say what I really thought. I did not feel that they would use what I said against me. (Personal communication, 2005)

> It was very interesting for me, after so many years of teaching, to all of a sudden to be asked the real questions and someone saying, "I don't have the answers." (Personal communication, 2005)

The teachers interviewed discussed the value of the round-robin approach and how it made everyone have a voice. One stated that:

> They made sure everyone had a voice. They made people share time rather than allow some to take over. They heard from all of us. (Personal communication, 2005)

One of the teachers interviewed described how in the past she had not liked the round-robin approach and described how the university facilitators made it different for her:

> I just remember feeling very supported. The atmosphere was really, really positive. I don't know if I really like round table that much, I can be threatened by it. I mean we did round table right where we all had to take our turn to speak. I didn't feel threatened at all, you know that. They were very supportive. Very open to anything, you know to what we had to say. Very warm and gentle. Like I said, I don't really like round table but I really enjoyed that. I'm trying to think back, very non-threatening. (Personal communication, 2006)

Many of the teachers interviewed supported the process because everyone was learning from everyone else. Many of the teachers discussed how they enjoyed hearing the methods other teachers were using in their classrooms and how they could apply them to theirs:

> I can remember hearing other people's ideas and there was one lady in particular and she would share some of the writing that her class had done or yeah I think it was a class write and I just sat there agog because I thought hey there's something that I could use in my classroom. And there was another person who did a lot of drama with her class but she only had 15 students or whatever so they would get down and crawl under the table and be Rosie in *Rosie's Walk* or whatever they were doing so there was lots of opportunities for ideas to be shared and you could see what other people were doing. (Personal communication, 2005)

A first-year teacher felt that learning from other teachers through this process was really assisting her in her classroom. She stated:

> I thought it was neat how people piggy backed on what other people did. Oh, I experienced that but this is what I did. It really gave me ideas and being a first-year teacher I thought that was fantastic because you come out of university kind of shell shocked going "Okay, they gave me this knowledge but how do I apply any of that knowledge?" So I think it was great being a first-year teacher that that support (was there). Some of it confirmed my teaching practices, some of it made me question why I was doing that and then some of it changed my teaching practices. (Personal communication, 2005)

Not only did the university partnership provide a non-threatening environment in which to reflect, it also provided a forum for teachers to share ideas and strategies. This process was assisted by their shared professional development. All of the teachers interviewed felt that having shared language and practices through Balanced Literacy, the

Diagnostic Reading Assessment, and the Grade 1 exams in the spring assisted with the discussions.

> We had a common language so when we talked about strategies we weren't all out there. We were talking about everything from grouping to what do you do when you are teaching Guided Reading? (Personal communication, 2005)

> One teacher discussed how we were able to share resources because of this. Oh have you tried this book with this? Oh no I haven't that's a great idea. So we knew what we were talking about versus everyone having such different books. We could also share the resources because we did borrow from [another school]. (Personal communication, 2005)

All of the teachers interviewed discussed the significance of having students from similar socio-economic backgrounds and the issues that emerge from having those students.

> I thought there was a lot of sympathy and understanding and support. And at the same time we didn't use it as an excuse. You know we knew the children could do the work. (Personal communication, 2005)

> It was just by the very nature of having to go there and having the time to think about the complexity of the job because when you are in the middle of it you are just so busy that actually to sit there and list all the challenges. I guess you can you know without being negative but FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), ESL

(English as a Second Language), late arrivals, absenteeism, transience, violence in the home, medical problems, speech delay. Those meetings forced me to list all those and think, Whoa! We are dealing with all of that. If I didn't have the time to reflect and was just busy surviving and getting the next day's lessons ready, that forced me to listen to everyone and to think yeah, there are a lot of obstacles. (Personal communication, 2006)

It was very important that we all had Grade 1 and also in the same school situations, socio-economic situations. So I think having that base knowledge with Balanced Literacy and then going to the more specific group with them all using Balanced Literacy, I think that helped because their ideas were practical ideas, versus the Balanced Literacy groupings, like it's all nice and pretty but teaching at some of the higher socio-economic being so different from what we were experiencing. And with all the ESL and different challenges. (Personal communication, 2005)

Overall, teachers viewed the university partnership as a positive experience which provided them with a time and place to discuss what they were doing and share ideas and strategies. The facilitators using a round-robin approach provided everyone with a voice in a secure environment and teachers were able to not only share ideas, but also to recognize the unique challenges they face as a group. In a subtle way, they began to broach the subject of changing practice.

Category 3: City Centre Education Project Grade 1 Cluster Groups

The formation of the CCEP and its accompanying grade-sorted cluster groups represents the final category. The cluster groups are of particular importance since they were designed to provide a vehicle for the sharing of strategies and problems within the CCEP.

This second project also included a partnership with the university. The coordinator of the CCEP had a lot of confidence in the work being done at the university and she wanted it to continue for longer than the original mandate of the small class size project. She stated that:

> The principals agreed that we were going to throw money in. If we wanted to change the landscape of urban ed. that a half a year study wasn't going to be enough. (Personal communication, 2005)

Principals' Perspectives

All of the principals interviewed felt that the Grade 1 cluster group was more collaborative than any of the other groups because of the work they had done in the university partnership.

One believed that the Grade 1 teachers were more collaborative because they had a previous relationship and they trusted each other:

> Through the research being done through the small class project, with your group, you already had a relationship that was positive and reflective. You welcomed each other because of that relationship and the trust. Trust is always a big issue

with new groups and you had already established that. (Personal communication, 2006)

Another principal felt that the Grade 1 cluster group had a different recognition and accountability that stepped up the collaboration:

> The Grade 1 cluster group was given a different kind of recognition. I think it is recognition mostly. Being involved with the university kind of steps up the collaboration and with that goes a different kind of accountability. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another focused on the trust and the experience. She felt that the Grade 1 groups were able to discuss issues immediately with each other.

> Your group worked better because you had experience. The trust was there and you could say I am lousy at something, I'm really having trouble with Guided Writing, Guided Reading, or I'm really having trouble with math concepts. It takes bravery to say to another colleague I'm not as good as I thought I was in this particular area. (Personal communication, 2005)

After observing Grade 1 teacher behaviour before, during, and after these projects, principals had an appreciation for the teachers' abilities to share and collaboratively work together. A group dynamic was self evident in the Grade 1 groups that was not present in others.

Teachers' Perspectives

All of the teachers interviewed discussed how being part of the university partnership allowed the members of the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group to transfer learned collaborative skills into a new setting. One teacher related that everyone knew and understood each other in her group which made it easy to jump right into discussions. She also expressed appreciation for the help she had received in becoming an active participant.

Another teacher talked about how the group was already functioning as a successful professional learning community because of their past experiences working together. She stated:

> Being a member of the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group was excellent the first year because we knew each other. We had a cluster group already established (due to the initial small class project and university partnership). We knew collaboration in a non-threatening situation. We were good at it. We had a respect for each other. We were all leaders. We knew we could make a difference through the Grade 1 collaboration group. (Personal communication, 2005)

The university facilitators were given credit for teaching and modeling how to work in collaborative groups.

> The university facilitators let us lead the way. It was about us and our kids and how it was working for us and just the support from those facilitators and from each other. It was so collaborative . . . so supportive and it became a model for

what the CCEP cluster groups were supposed to be. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another teacher discussed how, when a new group forms, members have to spend time developing a relationship. This had already been established in the Grade 1 cluster group.

> We were all already a group. It wasn't all new strangers. Hi, who are you, and try to feel everyone out because when you get into a group you sit back and kind of evaluate the group. Where I don't think any of us had to do that because we all knew each other and felt comfortable. (Personal communication, 2005)

Both teachers and principals, then, believed that past experience and training had contributed to the overall effectiveness of the Grade 1 cluster groups and they unanimously praised the university partnership for having a major positive impact.

Themes

Six themes emerged from the responses to the interviews. The six themes were: a positive regard that resulted in trust, empowerment, the provision of physical support for the project, inquiry and research that was accomplished through the university partnership, a shared vision and common language, and the lack of collaboration found in other cluster groups in the CCEP.

Theme 1: Positive Regard

One of the themes that emerged during the interviews was a positive regard for the teachers, principals, and university facilitators who were involved in the Grade 1 small class size project and the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group. This positive regard resulted in trust. The principals demonstrated a positive regard and trust for the teachers by removing themselves from direct control of this group and leaving the teachers to become the leaders. They also demonstrated support for this group in the way that they discussed the small class size project and the Grade 1 cluster with the teachers without interfering with the process and resorting to micromanagement or by being judgmental and expecting certain results.

The principals had a personal regard for the university facilitators because they all had previous relationships with the facilitators and trusted them to work with the teachers on the research paper. They trusted them to get the teachers to reflect on their practices and to demonstrate that they were changing their practices because they had fewer students. They needed the research to establish the argument that for students of lower socio-economic status, smaller class sizes were necessary to improve achievement. The principals would not have had the same level of confidence had they not had that previous relationship with the university facilitators and held them in such high regard.

The teachers developed a positive regard for both the university facilitators and for the other Grade 1 teachers in the university partnership. Before the project began, the teachers did not have a relationship with each other or with the facilitators. The teachers came from different schools and some were new to their positions because they had been

hired as part of the project. As they worked together and shared insights and practices, the teachers began to trust one another and develop a high personal regard for one another. This was also the case in their perception of the university facilitators. In time, the teachers began to trust and develop a high personal regard for these facilitators which in turn led to confidence in and effectiveness of their reflective practices.

> The university was really interested and that was reflected in the sessions. They trusted us with the information and I was able to say what I really thought. I did not feel that they would use what I said against me. (Personal communication, 2005)

A second teacher who took a long time before she trusted the project felt that without the reflections and the positive regard that was developed through those meetings she would not have developed trust.

> It took me a long time to begin to reflect on my practices because I did not trust them that they would really allow me to work with the small group. I kept thinking that they would come in and say, your class is back up to the large class. Through the reflections I began to believe that they would not change their minds. I almost felt protected from the system. (Personal communication, 2005)

From the literature Fullan (2003b) supported this by talking about the notion of "relational trust" (p.43). He defined it using Bryk and Schneider's (2002) definition that was four dimensional or consisted of four criteria: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity (cited in Fullan, 2003b, p. 43).

Theme 2: Empowerment

Empowerment for teachers came with their ability to discuss their classrooms freely and without judgment, to discuss their challenges openly and have colleagues and people who they perceived to be in power listen without judgment. They discussed how they knew their classrooms better than anyone else, and finally people who they perceived to be in power were listening to them.

Traditionally, research in education has been conducted by graduate students and professors. Teachers were not in control of this process. They often participated only as passive subjects of research and were just told how good or how bad they were doing within the context of the research questions posed. What happened in the small class size project was the exact opposite of this. One teacher summed it up as follows:

> We knew what we were doing and we were the ones bringing everything to the table that it was our project, our kids, and we never heard that this is about a research project, this is about money, or that we have to make it look right. We heard that it was all for the kids. (Personal communication, 2005)

Teachers are traditionally used to having to "earn" the respect of administrators and each other by achieving high test scores, establishing discipline, or some other outcome that can be measured and evaluated. In this situation, without having done anything, people were listening to them and viewing them as the experts. This had an impact on their work and their commitment to the project. With the new empowerment that emerged, they were able to discuss their students, their strategies, and their

frustrations and failures as well as their successes. In so doing, they were able to change practices and enhance the success of their students.

Theme 3: Physical Support

A theme that emerged from the interviews, although not explicitly, was that of physical support for the project. In all school environments, a natural and major concern for both teachers and principals was making sure the physical structure was in place so instruction could begin. In schools, many decisions made are based on funding; therefore, funding or physical support emerged as a theme. With both the small class size project and the CCEP cluster groups, there was money available.

The hiring of teachers to fill positions in the newly created Grade 1 classes was just the beginning. Classroom space, desks, equipment, and materials were also required. Such funding is a given in all schools but extra funding was required with the doubling of the Grade 1 classes. Professional development for the teachers involved was provided in the form of training in Balanced Literacy and the Diagnostic Reading Assessment so that all teachers in the project would have common practices and assessment strategies. Additional professional development time was also provided for teachers to attend group meetings with the university that allowed them to reflect on their practices and their assessment strategies.

The fact that the professional development was provided during school time was significant. It had an additional cost because substitutes needed to be brought in on PD days. This demonstrated that the project was not just an add-on that teachers would have

to deal with along with regular duties. The support was provided to allow them time to get the most out of their professional development and their time together. In addition to this, the frequency of the meetings, through the teachers' involvement in the university project and the CCEP cluster group, was such that teachers were able to meet often enough to maintain the momentum of the project. This added frequency also comes at a cost and must be considered in terms of physical support.

In conjunction with the above, it is important to the theme of physical support that the teachers involved had a venue in which to meet. This venue was supplied by the university and it provided a location away from the school and away from the influence of the Edmonton Public School system. Because of this support, teachers felt more relaxed and yet more involved in the project. Through various physical supports, they were afforded the time and place to reflect on their practice work toward improvement.

Theme 4: Research and Inquiry

The fourth theme involves the teachers not only changing their classroom practices with fewer students but also being able to reflect on their classrooms and discuss the real challenges that each teacher faced being a teacher in the inner city. The dialogue between teachers became a research exercise whose purpose was to improve instruction and the educational environment of the students. Teachers learned to talk about their classrooms without feeling that they were being judged by the university facilitators or their peers. This allowed teachers to feel ownership of the intellectual exercise. Questions that were sent to the teachers before the meeting helped the teachers

to focus and reflect on their students and their particular needs and to also reflect on the strategies that they were using to meet the students' needs with fewer numbers. One teacher summed this up by saying:

> I was highly motivated to change my teaching practices and the sessions helped me by giving me the courage to try things I couldn't have done with a larger group. I got a lot of good ideas from the others. The questions from the people at the university helped me focus. (Personal communication, 2005)

During the sessions, facilitators would listen and sometimes ask for clarification. The agenda for the next meeting often would ask the teachers to further reflect on an issue that arose during the previous meeting.

> They listened to us and I think they probably changed their agenda based on what we said. We were experts. I felt I had a voice for all Grade 1 teachers because it was a pilot project and it was important. I worked very hard for all of my students and I knew them. I adjusted my teaching for them. I had an active hands-on class. I know that is what is best for kids. (Personal communication, 2005)

The teachers had not been asked to be such active participants in the past and they felt this was the best professional development and research they had ever been a part of. One teacher stated during the interview, "It was my 20th year of teaching and that was the best thing that happened to me. It was wonderful and I miss it."

It was evident that the teachers in this project, by themselves, did not have the knowledge or experience to create this partnership in research that allowed them to feel they had control of the research. They did not know what a community of inquiry was.

The focus provided by the facilitators in a non-threatening manner was the impetus behind this theme. Their presence provided the "critical friend" that Stokes (2001) describes:

> It was this more intimate feel that enabled teachers to say things you wouldn't say in other settings. The critical friend role made an important contribution to teachers' ability to explore difficult issues because the supportive outsider could shoulder some responsibility for upholding the norms of conversation. The critical friend reinforced the legitimacy and value of what the teachers were doing, and was also a conduit of information—of books and articles—about the problems at hand. (p. 148)

Theme 5: Shared Vision/Common Language

The themes of shared vision and common language can be combined. The teachers participating in the small class size project all shared similar experiences in that they had worked with children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. They were all familiar with poor attendance, behaviour problems, unsupportive parents, low academic achievement, and new Canadians experiencing language and cultural barriers. They were also convinced that it was not the children's fault and that these students could perform at higher levels if they were given the opportunity. The small class size project gave the teachers the opportunity to prove that this was so. This opportunity was furthered by the formation of the CCEP and the Grade 1 cluster groups.

The in-servicing of the teachers in Balanced Literacy and the DRA (Beaver, 2001) further developed the teachers' use of a common language. When the teachers discussed the Grade 1 language arts program and the assessment of students, they each understood the successes and the challenges that each teacher was facing. The common language allowed for open discussions and solutions to be sought without judgment. It also provided for a lot of laughs.

Theme 6: The Lack of Collaboration

Another theme that emerged indirectly was the idea of transfer of knowledge and skills. The teachers who lived through the project had been empowered and supported and had formed a group that had a dynamic based on intellectual inquiry. This same group shared in its vision and a culture emerged which was reflective and sharing in its orientation. One could assume that members of such a group could bring these skills to other groups.

However, during the interviews, what emerged was that the other collaborative groups in the CCEP were not functioning well. Grade 1 teachers who went into other cluster groups were unable to motivate their new groups into becoming more collaborative. Two teachers found that the groups they were in were unproductive because members of the group were too busy complaining about being members of the CCEP. They did not see the benefit of the project and they did not feel they had a role in formation of this project.

> The small class size project people were excited about that. It was a positive thing. It was making your class smaller and being able to help kids with special needs, well any kids, it doesn't matter if they have special needs, helping kids being more successful, where as the CCEP was put on some people, they felt. It was something they had to do and they maybe weren't on side. So it didn't have that positive feeling. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another teacher felt that the group she became a member of was not working well because they did not have a common vision and only a few members were making all of the decisions.

> We do not seem to be on the same wavelength. We do not have a strong connection like we did. There is no leadership. We have trouble making decisions and listening to each member to make sure they agree. Not everyone has a voice. Less encompassing all in the decision making. (Personal communication, 2005)

Two teachers from the Grade 1 collaborative group were able to influence another cluster group when they both became members of the other group and they were able to transfer the skills and strategies they learned being a member of the Grade 1 group.

> I ended up in another CCEP group. The first different group (from the Grade 1 cluster group) I was in I was only there for one meeting. That was awful but my new group is very similar to our Grade 1 group. A teacher from the original small class project and I are both there okay so we are carrying over the collaboration and we have some really great people in this group so we are able to continue meeting as well as we did in the Grade 1s. (Personal communication, 2005)

Principals interviewed also discussed how other cluster groups were not functioning collaboratively. They saw lack of trust and skills as the two obstacles.

> The mistakes that we made were that we made some assumption that Number 1: we assumed that trust was going to be in those groups, and it wasn't. We assumed that teachers were so good at team planning and working together that they should not be a problem. We assumed wrong. We made some assumptions that this was going to just happen through osmosis. What we realized then, with all the complaining and everything that had happened, is that we assumed wrong. And where the Grade 1 teachers were way ahead of the stock pile. (Personal communication, 2005)

Another obstacle to collaboration that was discussed by a principal was that of teacher or occupational isolation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Freedman, 2001). Teachers were afraid to talk about their practices and critique them with other teachers. To many teachers it is seen as admitting that there may be something wrong with their teaching rather than trying to do even better.

> I think there are some other issues we need to think about and that is our willingness to dialogue, I'm taking a side track, but our willingness to dialogue, and I think we have lots of teachers who are not willing to engage in really deep debate and dialogue, passionate debate. They view that almost as conflict and personally I think it's a really important tool. I think the more we do that the better we understand. It allows us to understand and articulate what it is we are wrestling with. And sometimes even articulating something we do not believe

> after we articulate is a really healthy activity. And how you get people confident and comfortable enough to engage that way is part of our challenge, whether in a staff group or a cluster group. (Personal communication, 2006)

The relationships between the categories and themes are multifaceted. The concepts of positive regard and empowerment emerged from teachers, principals, and university facilitators all interacting in a collegial manner that demonstrated mutual respect, rather than competition, one-upmanship, and intimidation. Furthermore, the physical support that allowed for both time and place to interact, reflect, and dialogue provided the means for all the projects (categories of small class, university partnership, and CCEP cluster groups) to progress with a reduction in the hindrances that are commonplace in many school settings. From this basis came the reflection and dialogue necessary to develop the theme of research and inquiry. Teachers were (perhaps inadvertently) taught and coached in this by the university facilitators, and a common vision and shared language emerged from their shared professional development. What appeared to be a successful endeavour within the context of the small class size project was not seen to be transferable to other settings and groups within the CCEP.

The categories and themes that emerged from the interviews can serve to highlight findings by various authors summarized in the literature review. These same highlights may provide some answers, or at least some departure points for discussion, with respect to the original questions posed in Chapter 1. The literature review and the answers to the questions will both be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, PERSONAL REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has been divided into three parts: a concluding section, personal reflections, and recommendations for practice and research.

Conclusion

Significance and Purpose of the Study

From January 2000 to June 2000, Grade 1 teachers in 10 high-needs schools in the Edmonton Public School system began a pilot project that had their class sizes capped at 17 students. In conjunction with this, they participated in formal professional development activities and in a community of inquiry facilitated by the University of Alberta. This gave them the opportunity to reflect on their practices and develop teaching strategies that would maximize the effectiveness of the small class size setting. In September 2000, this pilot project was extended for an additional 3 years.

In September 2000 the CCEP began. Nine schools in the inner city worked together in 1999–2000 to determine how to create better learning opportunities for elementary and junior high students in the inner city. They came to the conclusion that they needed to close two schools and one junior high school program, thus increasing enrolment in the remaining schools. The increase in enrolment and the additional funding allowed the students to have better learning opportunities in the remaining seven sites. The teachers in the schools began to work together in grade or subject collaborative groups. The focus of these groups was to collectively determine how they could create

better learning opportunities for the students in their classes. They met seven times a year to reflect on practices and to share resources, professional development, and teaching strategies. The Grade 1 cluster group in the CCEP continued to work with the university facilitators that some of them had worked with in the pilot project. Two of the schools in the CCEP were not in the pilot project because they were not one of the 10 most high-needs schools. They did, however, become part of the 3-year small class size project when their schools joined in the City Centre Education Project.

The research for this thesis was designed to obtain insight into how administrators provided support and professional development to the Grade 1 teachers and how skills learned by the teachers through participation in the professional learning community transferred to their work in the City Centre Grade 1 cluster group and other collaborative groups.

Toward this end, four research questions were developed:

- What strategies did the university and school leaders use in supporting the teachers in the Grade 1 cluster group?
- How did the university researchers assist members in the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group to form a professional learning community?
- How were new members of the group integrated into the university learning community?
- How have teachers transferred the strategies developed from this experience to other collaborative environments?

In this concluding section, the four initial research questions will be discussed in terms of the comments of teachers and administrators during the interviews. This will be followed by a discussion of the literature as it relates to the interview responses. The categories and themes that emerged from the interviews will provide a backdrop for further discussion and reflection in the last two sections of the chapter. Such discussion will focus on the implications for practice in terms of administration and teaching, on the shortcomings of the research, and on future directions of research.

The Research Questions

In this concluding section the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

What strategies did the university and school leaders use in supporting the teachers in the Grade 1 cluster group?

The interview questions that were asked were to determine how principals believed they supported the Grade 1 teachers' work on the small class size project, university partnership, and in the CCEP cluster group. The questions posed to the teachers on leadership support were designed to determine if the teachers felt they had the backing of the administration in these projects and to determine the different methods principals used to show that support.

Small class size project.

The principals who were interviewed all indicated that they supported the project and they supported the teachers by insisting the teachers be in control of the project. One saw this project as one way of beginning to change the leadership in the school. He used it as a way to help him reduce teacher isolation and to build staff capacity through giving the teacher control of the project.

One teacher discussed how uncomfortable she was with how her principal announced the project and the fact that she had to make some key decisions. For example, it was up to her to determine how her Grade 1/2 class would be split to accommodate the small class size project, and she had to determine which class she would teach. She assisted with the hiring of the new teacher and she discussed the positive relationship she developed with that teacher and the support she felt from the administration in areas that directly affected her classroom. Her responses indicated that she was not used to having the control over such decisions in the past and that she had to move from working with a principal who used a top-down style of leadership to one who believed in shared.

The other teachers interviewed indicated different levels of principal interest and involvement. One felt her principal was not interested or involved in the project. By virtue of his lack of interest and involvement in the project, she had to take complete control of the project. She had to split classes, order supplies, and mentor the new teacher. Another teacher did not have control of the hiring, splitting of classes, or purchasing of materials but she felt she was verbally supported by her principal and

assistant principal through discussions with them. Finally, a new teacher who was hired for the project indicated the administrator supported her by allowing her to spend a week in the Grade 1 classroom before it was split to allow her to watch and get the feeling of classroom life and remove many of her fears about teaching.

University partnership.

The university partnership was the beginning of the teachers working together to reflect on their practices with fewer students. The principals indicated that they supported the Grade 1 teachers being involved in this work as the teachers would be working with skilled facilitators that they knew from previous experiences. They felt that they would be able to get teachers to focus on how they did things differently with fewer students and if a teacher was not doing things differently, they would be encouraged to through dialogue at these meetings. Two of the principals further discussed their support for continuing the project and partnership with the University of Alberta because they wanted Alberta-based research. One principal recognized the extra work that media interest created for the Grade 1 teachers and the need to create lesson plans to leave for the supply teacher. She also recognized the extra work the teachers were required to do to assist with the reporting for the AISI project.

Teachers felt the principals demonstrated their support for the university partnership in two ways. One, they were given release time during school hours, and two, their principals demonstrated interest in the project by discussing the meetings with the

teachers when they got back to the school. In one school the teachers were asked to share what went on at the meeting with the school staff at their weekly staff meeting.

Professional development.

With the small class size project came the in-service training for the teachers in Balanced Literacy and Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 2001). All of the principals stated that they supported the teachers being involved in this in-servicing. The principals discussed how the training supported their discussions with the teachers as it allowed the teachers to engage in in-depth conversations about student progress, practices in the classrooms, and learning. This in-servicing was important because it created common reporting practices in the district. Reporting was behaviourally-oriented rather than being outcome-focused. Finally, it was another measurement tool to use when they were required to demonstrate to the board and to parents that a child had experienced growth in the classroom.

The teachers did not discuss whether or not their principals supported them going to the in-service training. They did discuss how this in-servicing assisted them with sharing student progress with colleagues and parents, and with discussing strategies they were using and their struggles in some areas.

CCEP.

CCEP administrators all supported the formation of cluster groups in hopes of achieving a level of collaboration. The administrators all indicated in the interviews that

the Grade 1 CCEP cluster group stood out because of the level of collaboration that was occurring in that group. They felt that the experience these teachers had at the university sessions stepped up the group collaboration and provided for a different level of accountability. One principal discussed how the Grade 1 cluster group was able to work together and focus on how to make it better for students. Another principal felt that there were enough members in the Grade 1 cluster that had already built a community through the small class size project and therefore the relationships and trust were already in place. New teachers in that cluster were able to quickly develop relationships and trust.

How did the university researchers assist members in the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group to form a professional learning community?

In December 2000, it was announced to the Grade 1 teachers in the CCEP that they would be allowed to continue their discussions with the university facilitators about how they were changing practices in their classrooms with fewer students. The Grade 1 teachers were now meeting twice a month, once with the university and then in their Grade 1 cluster group. As indicated in the interviews, the frequency of the meetings strengthened the relationship, trust, common vision, and respect the teachers had for each other.

One teacher interviewed discussed how they were not strangers so they did not have to go through time-consuming relationship building. Another teacher interviewed told of how the teachers were able to continue unfinished discussions from the university session at the cluster group and how both meetings were using a similar round-robin

format where every member spoke and the group asked for every person's opinion. One teacher said, "We were like a family."

Another indicator of the high level of trust this group had was the Grade 1 teachers' joint marking of their students' HLAT writing tests. The purpose of joint marking of these exams was for the Grade 1 teachers to create a common evaluation tool. The common marking of students' tests had the potential of opening up a teacher's classroom to scrutiny, but because of the trust and relationships that had been built, what it did was remove teacher isolation and help the teachers to focus on teaching and learning.

One of the teachers interviewed, who had retired at the time of the interview, talked about how, for the first time in all her years of teaching, people were willing to really share. She talked about how people were not just sharing their lessons but they were sharing materials, proposals that got extra funding for fieldtrips, and going on joint fieldtrips with students from other schools. People were not afraid that by sharing they would not get something or lose what they had.

By the end, the learning community worked together and supported each other in such a way that they became a somewhat independent body with no need of administrator support other than the provision of time and material support.

How were new members of the group integrated into the university learning community?

With the formation of a professional learning community, members build a common vision, often have a common language or protocol, and develop trust and special

relationships. If a community is to survive it must have a method for integrating new members.

New members joined the university partnership and Grade 1 cluster group as two new schools joined the CCEP, new teachers covered maternity leaves, and natural transfers of teachers within the district took place. The teachers who became new members of these groups discussed how they felt included through participating in the professional development of Balanced Literacy and DRA (Beaver, 2001), the questions that were sent to them before the meetings that assisted them with their reflections, the themes that introduced each session at university, the round-robin sessions and the joint reflections that occurred at the meetings. A first-year teacher commented on the sharing attitude of the group where experienced teachers provided her with encouragement and support as well as a motivation for continual improvement.

How have teachers transferred the strategies developed from this experience to other collaborative environments?

When teachers were asked if they had been able to transfer the strategies they had learned through the university partnership to other collaborative groups, they all stated that they typically had not. However, one person interviewed said she was able to use the same strategies when another Grade 1 teacher from the small class size project joined her Grade 3 cluster group.

The obstacles they found to creating a professional learning community varied depending on the group they joined but they were consistent with the obstacles that are

cited in the literature review. One found that there was a lack of a shared vision. The focus of the teachers in that group was on curriculum and teachers, not on students. Another said that there was lack of shared leadership where a few members were controlling the group and the others did not voice any opinions. In another case there was no leadership and the main focus of the group was on how they did not want to be there. Others said that there was a lack of trust, respect, and the members had not developed relationships with each other. Even when teachers tried to influence groups into being more collaborative they said that the other members of the group were not interested. This lack of transfer will be addressed in the recommendations for practice.

Methodology

Interviewees were selected based on their experience and time spent in the small class size project, the university partnership, and the CCEP with its associated cluster groups. Four administrators and six teachers were interviewed. The interviews involved a pre-established set of questions where the answers were probed by the interviewer to provide additional focus and depth. This structure provided an initial direction but interviewees were allowed to set their own pace and direction and integrate their own individual perspectives to provide greater breadth to the data. This naturalistic relationship led to interpretations of the respondents' subjective views by both the interviewee and interviewer. Later interpretation by the interviewer was sent to and reviewed by the respondents to ensure credibility. This methodology has strengths and weaknesses that will be discussed under implications for further research.

Categories and Themes

After transcription and review of the interview questions and responses, three categories emerged from the chronological order of events discussed. These were participation in the small class other project, participation in the university partnership, and participation in the CCEP cluster groups. Review of the responses within these categories that served as organizers produced themes that emerged from the responses. These were positive regard, empowerment, physical support, inquiry, shared vision, and lack of collaboration in some groups. It is within the context of these themes that the literature has been re-visited and the implications for change in practice discussed.

Relationship of the Literature Review to the Categories and Themes

Professional Development

The teachers in the study were involved in two categories of professional development as defined in the literature. Balanced Literacy and the Developmental Reading Assessment in-servicing would be in the category of in-service training or staff development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Liberman, 1996). The teachers were in-serviced in these two areas by *experts* in the area of literacy learning. The purpose of the in-servicing was to improve teacher practices in language arts and to give the teachers in the project a common language arts program and assessment tool that complemented the Balanced Literacy Program.

The second professional activity the teachers were involved in was a university partnership that created a community of inquiry or professional learning community (Blase & Blase, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996; Stokes, 2001). The initial purpose of this group was to create the qualitative data for the research project that was to accompany the Small Class Size Project. Some of the members of this group went on to form the Grade 1 cluster group that began when the CCEP was formed.

The focus of this paper is the professional learning community and the teachers' and principals' perspectives on its formation; however the Balanced Literacy and the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 2001) training had an important effect on the formation of the professional learning community as it assisted teachers with developing common strategies and language that were used in their reflections and discussion on collective learning and its application.

The literature outlines certain common characteristics, supports, and obstacles that occur with the formation of a professional learning community (Hord, 2004). The characteristics that emerged during the interviews were the development of common vision and values, collective learning and its application, supportive conditions both physical and human, and shared leadership.

Shared Values and Vision

The authors on professional learning communities define the values or visions of both the leaders and the teachers in a professional learning community as having a focus

on student learning and a belief that all of the students in their schools or classrooms are capable of learning given the proper opportunities to realize their full potentials (DuFour, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, 2004). The teachers and leaders interviewed had a belief that students in the inner city were capable of learning and they were all committed to the vision that with proper learning environments and opportunities their students could achieve as well as students in schools in the more affluent areas. They had a belief that learning opportunities had to be different for the students in the inner city and the small class size project was one of these opportunities. The formation of the CCEP created a second set of opportunities to benefit the students in their classrooms and schools.

The small class size project created an opportunity for the Grade 1 teachers to create a common vision and values. The teachers wanted to demonstrate to the board and the province what they knew to be true, that working with smaller numbers would be better for their students, both academically and socially. One of the teachers interviewed discussed her desire to demonstrate to the board and the government that working with smaller numbers was better for the students in her class by saying that she worked harder with fewer students. She had a responsibility to be more active with her students, to be more hands-on. She felt she developed better projects for her students. She had to prove the success of the project in just 6 months.

Many teachers discussed the immediate connection to each other because all were working with students from similar socio-economic backgrounds. The teachers commented that they were able to discuss the challenges they face in the classroom. One

stated in the interview that none of the teachers used these challenges to make excuses. There was a feeling that all teachers believed the children could do the work.

The CCEP formation created another opportunity for the Grade 1 teachers to create common values and vision. The principals and the teachers interviewed discussed the need for the cluster groups in the CCEP to work cooperatively to share resources and to create learning opportunities for the students. For the teachers in the Grade 1 cluster group it was easier because of their previous work together on the small class size project. Three of the principals interviewed discussed how they had created their shared vision and values when they created the CCEP and closed two schools to achieve it. The other principal interviewed discussed how she had chosen to become a leader in a CCEP school because of her belief in the project.

From the interviews of the principals and the teachers, it became evident that other CCEP cluster groups were finding it more difficult to create shared values and vision. Principals and teachers discussed how teachers in those cluster groups were unable to work together because they were not focused on students and how they could make their classrooms better for the students. One principal stated that they were focused on their teaching and not on student learning.

Collective Learning and Application

Collective learning is defined as reflective conversations about students, teaching and learning, and identifying the related issues and problems (Hord, 2004; Stokes, 2001). Application is creating solutions to the issues and problems that result in improving

practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). The collective learning and application began for the teachers in the small class size project with the university partnership. The reflective dialogue question for the teachers in the small class size project was how they were changing their teaching practices with fewer students to improve instruction. One discussed the power of this experience by saying, "It was my 20th year of teaching and that was the best thing that happened to me. It was wonderful and I miss it."

This section will begin by discussing reflective practice and then it will discuss the university partnership and how it supported or did not support the teachers.

The literature discussed three components of collective dialogue and its application. They were the construction of text, evaluating and critiquing the text, and a change in practice. Many factors assisted these teachers with their ability to create text and evaluate and critique their practices. All of the teachers were concerned with implementing the Grade 1 curriculum, they were using Balanced Literacy in their classrooms, and they were evaluating their students in language arts using common assessment strategies through the DRA (Beaver, 2001) and district measures. The teachers were able to discuss implementation of these programs with limited home support. One of the teachers, during her interview, discussed how much she enjoyed the university partnership and the CCEP group because she could talk openly about the challenges she was having implementing Balanced Literacy into her classroom with students who were from lower socio-economic backgrounds and when English was the second language in the homes. She felt that her district Balanced Literacy training group

did not understand the challenges she was facing because they were teaching students who did not come from lower-income families.

Another factor that assisted with text and discussions was that the teachers were able to discuss social issues that were unique to their students. They were able to discuss openly these problems and how they affected their classrooms and their students.

As stated previously, this group began its collective work through the university partnership. Literature states that certain supportive conditions need to occur if a partnership is to be successful. These include a comfortable place for all members that is safe and supportive, an equal relationship, a method for ensuring that all members of the group have an equal voice, a plan for the introduction of new members when the group has already been established, and finally the ability to accommodate a wide range of text (Freedman, 2001; Miller & O'Shea, 1996).

The teachers felt that they had a successful partnership with the university. In the interviews they discussed that they felt comfortable meeting at the university for two reasons: one, because it was away from an Edmonton Public School building so felt safe, and two, it had a more intellectual atmosphere. In the interviews they discussed the methods that the university used at the meetings that made them feel honoured, supported, and that their voice was important—the pre-sent agenda and focus questions for reflection, the decorating of the room, and the activities that the teachers engaged in when they arrived that had themes that acted as metaphors for the work the teachers were doing with students. The round-robin format used for the discussions ensured that everyone had an equal voice. The questions that the facilitators asked during the

discussions demonstrated to the teachers that the facilitators were interested in the work the teachers were doing and that they were listening. One teacher discussed how she had been reluctant to speak at other professional development activities she had been at that used a round-robin format but at this one she enjoyed the round-robin because she felt safe and supported. As stated in the literature all teachers must have an equal voice. Experience is not the criteria for having a greater voice. One teacher interviewed had been new to teaching and one had returned after some time away. They both discussed in the interview the value of listening to others and then adding their experiences.

Two teachers that were interviewed were experienced teachers who were new to the City Centre. They joined the university partnership after they were hired. They discussed how the themes made them feel welcomed to the group and the round-robin approach gave them a voice equal to the voices in an already established group.

A wide range of texts were accommodated through encouraging the teachers to reflect on their changes to practice by bringing samples of student work to share at the meetings, and by writing on one student in their classrooms. The teachers in the small class size project were encouraged to keep a journal on one student they felt had benefited from the project. The teachers chose which student and what they wanted to report on. The teachers in the initial small class size project were given the opportunity to write a paper, for university credit, on one student who had demonstrated a great deal of growth in the project. Four of the teachers interviewed chose to write a paper for the university; all of them took their summer vacation to do this.

Finally these teachers were involved in action because as stated previously they focused on how they were changing their teaching practices and how the changes were impacting student achievement both academically and socially.

Supportive Conditions

Supportive conditions have been divided into two categories: physical and structural conditions and human and social conditions. The physical and structural conditions that influenced this project were time to meet and talk, teaching roles that are interdependent, resources, staff development, a place to meet, communication structures, and teacher empowerment (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Teaching roles that are interdependent, a place to meet, communication structures, and staff development have been discussed previously in other areas. Three supportive conditions that were highlighted in the interviews were time to talk, frequency of the meetings, and teacher empowerment. Money was provided for supply teachers, thus allowing these teachers to have time to talk away from their schools. These teachers were provided with additional time to meet through the seven scheduled cluster group meetings that were provided by the City Centre Education Project, thus increasing the frequency of these meetings and strengthening the teachers' ability to reflect on their practices and make changes. Empowerment was a theme that emerged from the interviews. The teachers felt empowered because they felt they were seen as the experts by both the university facilitators and the administration at their schools. They felt empowered because these

people were listening to what they had to say and asking questions that proved to them that they were truly interested.

The other supportive conditions defined in the literature were categorized as human and social conditions (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). In this study, trust, induction of new members, and supportive leadership were the supportive human and social conditions that emerged. Trust and personal regard were themes that emerged in the findings. The teachers in the interviews discussed how they began to trust the reflective conversations and the people involved because the teachers were allowed to lead the way, they were being listened to, and they were able to say what they really thought. Several discussed how they felt supported and comfortable with the teachers and the facilitators at the university.

The principals in the study also discussed the trust and personal regard they had for the teachers involved and the facilitators.

Supportive and shared leadership is stated as one of the characteristics or as a supportive condition for a professional learning community to be successful. The literature review states that the leadership needs to encourage the teachers to reflect on their practices in self-managing teams if change is to occur (Blase & Blase, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1996; Schmoker, 2005). The principals agreed with this statement and discussed the importance of teachers reflecting on their practices as they were the experts in the Grade 1 classrooms and also that it was important that the teachers were discussing, reflecting, and questioning if change was to occur.

The teachers discussed the support they got from their principals as being money to be released and the principals asking questions to demonstrate their interest when the teachers returned. One teacher discussed how she was not supported by her principal but was left to take the leadership in the project, yet by her principal's removal of himself from the project, he empowered her to become the leader of the project.

Two obstacles to shared and supportive leadership were discussed during the interviews that are consistent with the literature. With other collaborative groups that the teachers joined they found it hard to transfer the practices they had learned in the university partnership because there was either no leadership or there was one individual leading the group and it was very hard to change the format that had been adopted by that leader. In the literature the teachers' unwillingness to take on shared leadership roles is often defined as the comfort of teacher isolation. Leadership is seen as taking too much of their time and they are more comfortable with letting someone else do it or having no leadership. One teacher found her group did not want to cooperate for this reason. Many were looking for different positions or retiring.

Personal Reflections

While undertaking this study I questioned the influence that I, being a member of the community of inquiry and a Grade 1 teacher in the CCEP, had on the research. I had a relationship of trust with the people I interviewed and I was able to dialogue with them at a different level as I knew what they were talking about without lengthy descriptions. I felt that they were being honest and their analysis was deeper than it would have been

with an outside researcher. For two participants I provided background information because they were hired after the completion of the initial small class size project. I did wonder at times if the people were giving me an answer they thought I wanted to hear versus their true feeling because of this relationship and their desire to be helpful.

Another influence on the research was that the responses were influenced by how the participants were feeling that day. For example, one teacher was having a bad day at school on the day of the interview and it may have influenced her answers. Time to do follow-up interviews would have helped to compensate for such influences.

The university partnership had been completed over 2 years before the interviews began. Time influenced the responses and the people willing to participate in the interviews. One person had retired and moved; however, we had a discussion before she left and then I was able to send her the transcripts and the questions. I asked if she wanted to add or clarify anything from the interview. She sent a written response and added a few points to the interview response. One person who had agreed to be interviewed left the CCEP and no longer wanted to be interviewed. I was disappointed because I was looking forward to hearing that person's responses. Interviewing people at the end of the university partnership may have changed the responses.

I sent everyone a set of questions before their interview. This allowed people to think about the project and reflect on their reactions. Although we digressed a great deal during the interview, people had reflected on their participation in the projects and wanted to discuss their reactions. In one case my tape recorder stopped working and it became the longest interview and the conversation was more divergent than the other

interviews. This led me to wonder about the influence on responses when conversations were being taped.

Recommendations

The recommendations come from the literature review, from the analysis of the responses from principals and teachers, and from my involvement in these projects.

First, there need to be more university partnerships of this nature with teachers and schools. The partnership with the university had two important components for the teachers and the principals. One, they set up a community of inquiry. Two, they were researching the teachers' change in practices with fewer students by asking the teachers. Both the teachers and the principals felt this relationship had an influence on the teachers and their ability to reflect on teaching practices and change what they were doing in their classrooms. They both indicated that this would not have occurred without this partnership. The teachers felt honoured that they were being asked for the answers to questions and that the researchers respected their work in the classroom. The teachers were able to continue to use the strategies they learned with the university when the CCEP cluster group began. If more teachers and schools were working with the university in this manner, we would see more pertinent research and we would see changes in practice by teachers who were resisting.

Second, provide time for teachers, principals, and consultants to study professional learning communities. The research proves that if we want to change practices through focusing on the students and their ability to learn then we need to have

communities of inquiry that allow teachers and principals to reflect on their students and their teaching. Teachers, principals, and consultants need to learn the characteristics of a professional learning community. They also need to recognize potential obstacles that may occur in creating these environments and the methods other communities have used to overcome these obstacles.

Finally, people need to be trained to be skilled facilitators who are not seen as stakeholders, so they can assist teachers, principals, and consultants with creating these professional learning communities. The facilitators need to create a method for ensuring everyone has an equal voice. They can assist with creating questions that the participants get before the meeting that assist them with reflecting on practices before they come to the community. They would assist with changing the questions based on group responses and when the group wants greater clarification and lastly, they would determine a method for welcoming the members to the group and including new members.

Implication for Further Study

An implication for further study came about due to training I have received through a school and classroom management and instructional strategies program called Tribes. In 2006–2007 I will become an Edmonton Public Schools district trainer for this program. I will be training many teachers through a variety of sessions on the use of Tribes in their classrooms. After the teachers complete their initial 4-day training session, a natural progression is toward the creation of professional learning communities. I will be able to use many of the same methods that I had the advantage of learning about

through my involvement in the university partnership and through completing this research. A place for further research on professional learning communities is with these groups.

A second implication for further research involves the present day CCEP cluster groups. Many of the groups, as discussed in this paper, have been unable to create a collaborative environment; therefore, the format of the meetings is changing in an attempt to create some common language and common visions for these groups through in-servicing. Two of the meetings next year will be with the traditional cluster groups and three will result from the individual teacher's choice of an in-service area of interest (for example: planning for students with different needs, Tribes, math, poetry in the classroom). Comparison of the relative success of these two types of cluster groups may lead to further discussion and change of practice in professional development designed to promote professional learning communities.

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APPENDIX A

LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS AND CONSENT FORMS

April 16th, 2005

Dear Colleague,

I am planning to conduct interviews of principals and teachers who were participants in the initial small class Grade 1 study and the collaborative Grade 1 group in the Centre City Education project (CCEP). The purpose of the survey will be to provide insight into how school administrators provided support and professional development to participating staff thus allowing for successful implementation of small class teaching strategies.

- What strategies did the university and school leaders use in supporting the teachers in the Grade 1 cluster group?
- Did the university researchers assist members in the CCEP Grade 1 cluster group form a professional learning community?
- How were new members of the group integrated into the university learning community?
- How have teachers transferred the strategies developed from this experience to other collaborative environments?

The researcher for this study will be myself, Ann Back, supervised by Margaret Haughey of the University of Alberta. The interviews will form the basis of my master's thesis in the department of Educational Policy Studies.

I am writing to you to seek your consent to participate in the interviews. Your help is invaluable since you were a key participant in the CCEP small class Grade 1 collaborative group and professional development that accompanied your participation. There will be one interview per participant and the length of the interview will be approximately forty-five minutes. The interviews will be scheduled in coordination with the interviewee so that they do not interfere with class time or class preparation. The interviews will be recorded to assure accuracy. Interviewees are selected on the basis of their participation in the collaborative Grade 1 group in the CCEP.

My research will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants and all information provided will be kept confidential. No names of participants will be released and no information will be released that would specifically identify a participant. A written summary of the findings will be presented to you to review for accuracy before I incorporate it into my thesis. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in these interviews.

Please note that you have the right to:

- Not participate
- Withdraw from the process at any time
- Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality
- A copy of the final report

The only intended use of this report at this time is to fulfill the requirements of the Masters of Education Program thesis route. In the future, the findings may be shared with the education community at large should interest in this type of shared experience continue.

If you have any concerns or complaints before, during or after the interview sessions you may contact any or all of the following:

Ann Back

Ph. 780–436–7712
aback@ualberta.ca

Margaret Haughey
Faculty Advisor
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
780–492–7609
margaret.haughey@ualberta.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780–492–3751.

If you agree to participate in these interviews, please send an e-mail to Ann Back at aback@ualberta.ca with the following message:

I have understood the information regarding my involvement in this study and herby give my informed consent to participate.
Your Name

Address

Telephone (Day)

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and consider my request. Your contribution to this project is very much appreciated.

Yours Truly

Ann Back
Master's Student
Education Policy Studies

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATORS

Administrator Questions

The development of a learning community requires leaders who are committed to shared leadership and collaboration. With the small Grade 1 project, you shared the leadership and you were very supported of the teachers that were involved in your schools

1. How do you feel you facilitated shared leadership in your school with the Grade 1 small class project?
2. Did you find any of the other teachers in your school were negative about a select group having reduced class size? How did you deal with colleagues in your school who were negative about this group having a unique focus?
3. With the CCEP collaborative groups, how do you feel you encouraged shared leadership?
4. How did the group that met with the university representatives differ from other collaborative groups within the CCEP?
5. Many of the teachers in your schools through the small class size project were inserviced in Balanced Literacy and the Diagnostic Reading Assessment. How do you feel the Balanced Literacy and the DRA professional development contributed to the effectiveness of your reporting to both parents and the board?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Questions for Teachers

1. When you became a member of the small Grade 1 class project, how did the leadership at your school assist you? How did they assist you with attending the research study group?

2. When your class was reduced in size and you became part of a research study, how did colleagues at your school or in other schools, with larger class, react to this special situation?

3. We were all involved in a very unique situation with the professors from the university. We were encouraged to reflect on our practices, especially those that changed due to the reduce class size. What techniques did these meetings use to make you to feel you were a valued member of this group?

4. We were asked to reflect and share the changes in our practices with a reduced number of students. How did these meetings assist you with changing some of your teaching practices?

5. How did the people from the university assist you with your reflections?

6. At the end of June the meetings ended but your class remained small for an additional three years. How did you feel when the meetings stopped?

7. We were all involved in Balanced Literacy, how do you feel that assisted you in your class and with your collaboration in the project?

8. We were also taught how to use the DRA as an assessment tool. Do you feel this assisted you with your assessment and teaching of students?

CCEP

1. Many of us were involved in the small class Grade 1 project and the university study, how do you feel that assisted us with our CCEP collaborative group?

2. Different settings often change relationships. We had three different settings in which we meet: Sandra's house, the university, and at breakfast. How do you think that these settings assist you with developing relationships?

3. What are the similarities and differences between the small class project and other collaborative groups you are a member of?

APPENDIX D

EXCERPT OF AN ADMINISTRATOR TRANSCRIPT

I. Part of my research is looking at the collaborative groups within the CCEP. I'm looking at the influence the small class project had on the Grade 1 cluster group and if they were able to take the strategies they learned in the small Grade 1 project to other cluster groups in the CCEP. Being an administrator from your viewpoint how did you think our Grade 1 cluster group compared to others?

R: Better because you had experience. We made mistakes and remember all those decisions weren't my decisions some decisions were done as a group of eight. If you go back at look at our first year you guys were experienced, you were way ahead of everyone else. We made some mistakes. The mistakes that we made were that we made some assumption. We assumed that trust was going to be in those groups, and it wasn't. We assumed that teachers were so good at team planning and working together that they should not be a problem. We assumed wrong. We made some assumptions that this was going to just happen through osmosis. What we realized then, with all the complaining and everything that had happened, is that we assumed wrong. The Grade 1 teachers were way ahead of the stock pile.

I Were any other groups doing well?

R: And the kindergarten began to be far more. I believe it was the full day kindergarten there was a whole bunch more stuff done at a district level. I think they went to full day kindergarten workshops and stuff. I don't know what the calibre was, I don't know what the level was, but I think what happened there was that they had dug the ditch for stuff to happen.

The second year we brought in the consultants. We had taught them all what to say and that was the year we asked for a year plan and that was also the time where we asked for the minutes. Do you remember the first year we never asked for minutes? There was very little accountability there so it became a time where people came to complain. So we learned from it. We looked at that and said "Holy smokes we've made some real errors here on making some assumptions."

Then what we did at that time, people's accountability will increase if they feel they have some control over money. That's when we all pitched in from our individual budgets, whatever it was, the custodians and everybody to come up with that plan for whatever they wanted to do with the money.

R: And I think that's where the kindergartens began with the author boxes and then it went to all that stuff. Then it was interesting from that came, then we got complains from the union of the truck drivers for occupational safety.

APPENDIX E

EXCERPT OF A TEACHER TRANSCRIPT

I: We were all involved in a very unique situation with the professors from the university. We were encouraged to reflect on our practices, especially those that changed due to the reduce class size. What techniques did these meetings use to make you to feel you were a valued member of this group?

R: I came into the group and it was already an established group. It was such a comfortable group that everyone made me feel welcome. The facilitators who facilitated it, I thought it was neat how the used metaphors and props to make the atmosphere relaxed and kind of guided us, like they had puzzles. They used metaphors like stepping stones, and plants to grow. So I thought that was neat. I thought they were facilitators, they sat back and listened to us talk and thought, "Oh that's interesting, could you expand on that more," instead of dictating, "Okay, this is what the agenda is today, you've spent 5 minutes on that, let's go to the next one." They didn't stop us if we went off on tangents.

I: When you were there did we do round robin?

R: Yes they did. I thought it was neat how people piggy backed on what other people did. Oh, I experienced that but this is what I did. They also asked us what we wanted to talk about at future meetings instead of saying this is what (you will discuss). They did maybe give some suggestions but I think they took most of them from us. I thought that was great because that made us feel we were important in the meetings. It was not like in some of the other professional development they like to say, "This is the agenda and this is your homework." When we got our homework, I didn't feel that it was a useless exercise. I felt it benefited us. When we looked at our class arrangement I thought it was neat because it made me evaluate, why do I have things in those areas ?

I: How did the people from the university assist you with your reflections? I think you answered part of that when you talked about the questions.

R: They gave us suggestions about what to discuss like the cultural issues and the cultural makeup of our class. I would never have sat down and went, "Okay, I have 3 of this and 5 of this." I think that made me step back and go, woo look at my group, holy smokes.